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The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REICHERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. RANGEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Georgia?

There was no objection.

HURRICANE KATRINA DISASTER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening with a heavy heart. What we have witnessed during the past few days in New Orleans and the gulf coast of Mississippi and Alabama is unreal. It is unbelievable.

This did not have to be. We were told by the National Weather Service and by the media that a dangerous storm, a very dangerous storm, was on the way; but something went wrong. Somebody someplace at the highest level of this government fell asleep at the switch.

Our government had time to act, but we failed to move. The strength and the might of the most powerful Nation on Earth, the only remaining superpower, could not defend, could not protect, could not save her people.

Even a mother hen in time of great trouble, in the midst of a mighty wind, would gather her little chick under her wing. Can we do any less?

I do not understand how we can put a man on the Moon, how we can go to the bottom of the ocean, or conduct a war thousands of miles away, yet we cannot save our own citizens here at home.

What happened in New Orleans is an embarrassment and a national disgrace, and it must never ever happen again. Some people are trying to blame local and State officials for this disaster, but as Harry Truman suggested, the buck stops at the top.

What this disaster has showed us is that this Nation is still divided by both race and class. This administration never had an urban policy. It never tried to find a way to help the poor in America.

There were people with very little means who were left out and left behind in New Orleans. They did not have an automobile or an SUV. They could not buy an airplane ticket to go to Dallas or Houston, Chicago, or Atlanta. They were left out and left behind, not just in apartments but waiting in water up to their waists, to their chests, over their heads. They have

been trapped for decades in lives of poverty and neglect.

Do not tell me that our government cannot be responsible. Do not tell me that it is hard to respond. When we get ready to go to war, we do not ask two former Presidents to go pass around a tin cup to raise money. We authorize, we appropriate, and that is what we should do now.

Do not tell me that this Nation cannot respond in a crisis when the safety of the American people is at stake.

In 1957, when there was a crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, at Central High, President Eisenhower sent in the Federal troops.

In 1961, when there was a crisis during the Freedom Rides, Americans were beaten and brutalized, President Kennedy placed the city of Montgomery under martial law and sent in the National Guard to protect the lives of local citizens.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson did not hesitate. He used his capacity, he used his power as Commander in Chief to call out the Federal troops to protect Americans as they marched from Selma to Montgomery.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are the most powerful Nation on Earth; and we are able, we are able, we have the ability, we have the capacity to respond in a crisis. We have the means. Now we just have to find the will.

A great nation is defined by the methods it uses to defend the dignity of humanity. This hurricane has put us to the test, and it is my hope and my prayer that some good can come out of this very bad situation.

People have lost their lives. Families are broken. Mothers are here. Fathers are there. Children and grandchildren are someplace else. We may never really know how many people died because of this disaster. There are people suffering from dehydration. People cannot get their medicine. They are stranded for days and cannot get food to eat or water to drink. A great Nation, a proud people should be able to do better.

The American people have taken the lead. They have poured out their compassion and come to the aid of their fellow citizens. They have expressed a sense of righteous indignation. They have called us on the telephone. They have e-mailed us. They are demanding action. They want to know why this has happened; and Mr. Speaker, it is the role of their government to respond.

We must deliver Federal support to help rebuild New Orleans, to help rebuild the gulf coast of America. We must deliver Federal support to help rebuild the lives of thousands of American people and help them find their way back home; and if we do anything less, if we fail to act, then I am afraid the spirit of history will not be kind to us.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WATSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, we got word today that there will be a bipartisan, bicameral investigation into what went wrong in the Federal Government's response to Hurricane Katrina. This is welcome news. A full investigation will help us understand, in detail, how we can improve our disaster response capabilities to prevent this sort of mishandling from ever happening again.

The problem is that an investigation will take months. Meanwhile, it is clear that the Federal Government still does not have its act together on this crisis; and in the meantime, people are dying.

Here are just a few of the recent foul-ups:

In the Gulf of Mexico, the USS Bataan, a Navy hospital ship, has been sitting in the Gulf of Mexico since Hurricane Katrina hit. Yet the Bataan's hundreds of hospital beds are still going empty.

FEMA has requested hundreds of firefighters from around the country to rescue Katrina victims, but for 4 days they have been sitting idle in a hotel at the Atlanta airport and playing cards while studying FEMA history. Said one Pennsylvania firefighter, "On the news every night you hear hurricane victims say, How come everybody forgot us? We didn't forget. We're stuck in Atlanta drinking beer."

On Tuesday, FEMA asked the South Carolina Department of Public Health to scramble on only a half hour of notice to receive 180 injured evacuees from New Orleans. The South Carolina doctors then waited for hours for the evacuees to arrive in Charleston. It turns out that FEMA had sent the evacuees to the wrong Charleston: Charleston, West Virginia, instead of Charleston, South Carolina, where the doctors were waiting.

Now we hear that the director of FEMA, Michael Brown, waited hours after Katrina hit before submitting a plan to send FEMA personnel into action. This despite the fact that the President of the United States had declared a Federal emergency 2 days before Katrina hit.

Mr. Speaker, Republicans are eager to accuse anyone who questions the Federal Government's response of "playing politics." But this is not about politics. This is about getting answers as to why our Federal Government cannot protect its citizens. We cannot sit still waiting for hearings when it is clear that Americans are suffering and dying while their government officials learn on the job.

Mr. Speaker, the Director of FEMA, Michael Brown, needs to go and to go now. This is not a political act; it is a humanitarian act. Who knows how

many Americans might still be alive if someone other than Mr. Brown was in charge of FEMA. Mr. Brown should get out of the way so someone with experience can come in and fix this whole thing; and if Mr. Brown does not come to his senses and step aside, the President should remove him immediately.

Some say that we cannot switch leaders in the midst of this relief effort because it would disrupt the efforts already under way. Mr. Speaker, I do not see how our worst enemies could disrupt our efforts much further. It seems the effort will be far more organized if someone other than Mr. Brown were in charge.

One more disturbing trend I have noticed is the effort of administration officials to shift the blame to State and local officials for this scale of disaster. This is unconscionable, and I do not think the American people will really swallow it. The President declared Katrina to be a Federal emergency 2 days before it hit. He claimed responsibility for the emergency response for the Federal Government. Now it is time for him to take responsibility for the Federal Government's colossal failure.

HURRICANE KATRINA DISASTER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I am joined this evening by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), my colleague from New Orleans, on a Special Order held by the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss the events of the last few days relative to Hurricane Katrina.

As you know, we have had serious troubles in our part of the country. The gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) and myself, who are members of the Congressional Black Caucus, have had our districts pretty much decimated because of Hurricane Katrina, and we have some serious concerns about our government and its response. On behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus, we want to share those concerns tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I yield at this point to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON).

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, it is important the Congressional Black Caucus address these issues tonight because many of the people who are affected by this tragedy are African American and otherwise impoverished or disadvantaged, and they are folks who need to have their concerns given voice tonight.

Many of our Members will talk on different issues. I want to talk about the recovery of that area, of our area, and about an economic recovery pack-

age for New Orleans and the other areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Hundreds of thousands of my constituents have been uprooted from their homes. More than 100,000 businesses have been shuttered, and possibly thousands of lives have been lost to the wrath of Hurricane Katrina.

The extent of the damage, the human toll, property damage and economic loss is unprecedented in our Nation's history.

Of particular significance, a disproportionate share of the damage in my hometown of New Orleans was meted out to parts of our great city that were already extraordinarily economically disadvantaged.

The poverty and economic depression in these areas in no small way were factors in the extraordinary loss of life and property experienced by my constituents.

For that reason, it is critically important at this time to come together to ensure that all areas affected by Hurricane Katrina receive the necessary resources to rebound from what could be an economically devastating blow all across the gulf coast.

Now, we are talking about an economic package of \$40 billion coming up. We just approved \$10 billion a few days ago, but I think it is important to put the right number before the Congress. At this time, we do not know what that number is, but we know it is a lot larger than \$50 billion.

The Wall Street Journal reports today that through their own analysis they have come up with a figure of \$150 to \$200 billion. Today, at a press conference, I called on our Congress and our Nation to set aside some \$225 billion for this tragedy, \$100-plus billion for New Orleans alone.

I believe it is important to talk about a number that is closer to the right number now so that we will not have the rest of the Congress figuring that we have already fixed the problem with 40 or 50 or \$60 billion when we know it is going to be four times that number.

So as the Congress moves on various relief packages, I would like to articulate a few principles and policy proposals I believe should guide our efforts and be included in any relief package.

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First, the urban poor in New Orleans were dramatically and disproportionately affected, as I have said, by the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, our efforts must include provisions to improve conditions to the point that the magnitude of the damage is never again experienced in our great Nation.

Second, businesses large and small have been shuttered throughout the region, leading to an economic double whammy. Not only is the region cut off from the goods and services provided by these businesses, but the tens of thousands of employees working for these businesses are cut off from their jobs and their paychecks.

Third, the public health effects of Hurricane Katrina are also extraordinary. In response to the health impacts of the hurricane, we must restore health care access, health care quality, health outcomes and the health care worker force because all Americans deserve equal treatment in health care. A proper investment in health care will improve both the health and economic well-being of our region and our country. The legislation we propose ought to address rebuilding the public health infrastructure and ensuring health care coverage. We must, therefore, move to immediately counter these difficult challenges.

On the economic front, I think it is important to propose measures to jump-start the economic recovery throughout the gulf coast, and in the long term to improve the lives of hard-working Americans throughout the region. Because there are a number of Federal tax benefits conditioned on the household living situation of the taxpayer, and in light of the extraordinary displacement of citizens throughout the region, I think we should recommend changes to the Tax Code that ensure that displaced Americans are not disqualified from the tax benefits to which they are otherwise entitled as a result of the hurricane.

Under current law, there are limits on a taxpayer's ability to deduct casualty or disaster losses in ways that would severely affect large numbers of our constituents. Accordingly, I believe we should propose to eliminate any barriers in the Tax Code that would prevent the devastated families from the tax relief to which they are now entitled.

So many of our people who lost their property back home were not home owners; unfortunately, they lived in apartments. They did not have renters insurance or flood insurance. They have lost everything. This has to be taken into account as we go about this.

One of the most extraordinary effects of Hurricane Katrina ever is the unprecedented destruction of housing in New Orleans. One hundred sixty thousand homes in New Orleans alone, and across the area more than 200,000 homes have been affected by this or destroyed by this hurricane. This is going to take some extraordinary action by FEMA and HUD, and some flexibility in the Community Development Block Grant program and the HOME program to get our region back on its feet.

I think we should look at the New Markets Tax Credits program and add \$1 billion in 2006 and another \$1 billion in 2007 to help with the restructuring there.

With our businesses, of course, there are no jobs, and we ought to ensure that we provide businesses throughout the region the tools necessary to reopen and thrive, as well as incentives to provide jobs to the thousands of displaced Americans throughout the region.

On health care, we ought to have a declaration of emergency to trigger